

ICG\IRANGATE.1
(Samna)Notes on Irangate (Irangate.1)
December 13, 1986

--Hyp: The planning for a Nicaraguan invasion, apparently envisioned for the spring of 1987, is to be seen as a continuation of the Vietnam War--a new demonstration of American will to hegemony, the earlier one having failed--in the way that WWII was a continuation, after an interlude, of WWI. As Gordon Sherman commented, the Germans did not accept WWI as a definitive defeat; rather, there had been a "stab in the back." It was a loss that remained to be wiped out, reversed, revenged.

c-I
CRISIS
(cont.)
WWI +
WWII
C-I and
C-II

As Kahneman and Tversky would say, it was a change in situation, asset position, to which the nation had not adjusted; it did not define a new zero, a new status quo, but was still registered as a (tentative, temporary) loss. The books hadn't yet been closed. That is the state of mind, the "frame" for new decisions, which predisposes a decision-maker to take great risks of still greater losses, for a small chance of "coming out even," "getting even," wiping out a threatened humiliation which "isn't final yet," which can still be avoided. (It is the state of mind of the bettor who is behind, coming up to the last race of the day; it disposes him to bet long shots).

According to the Bay Guardian piece, this isn't the attitude of the JCS: they did learn their lesson, close the books. But of the civilians over them, and their military subordinates...

--As in Vietnam, it turns out that the national decision-makers weren't so unrealistic, so Utopian, as they appeared in their public statements and publicly admitted programs. Hyp: Reagan and the Pentagon have not, probably from the beginning, seen the contras as able to overthrow the Sandinistas, any more than they could interdict supplies to El Salvador; nor would the contra war "bring the Sandinistas to the bargaining table." Their function was to prepare public and allied opinion and otherwise prepare in a variety of ways for the US invasion of Nicaragua--and El Salvador--perhaps preceded by direct bombing operations.

Thus, attacks by Honduran planes last week were probably, as Ortega charged, intended to provoke a Nicaraguan reaction which would be an excuse for larger-scale bombing, perhaps by US planes. Likewise, plans for killing the Ambassador to Costa Rica, Tambs (who resigned last week for unexplained reasons) were to provide an excuse for intervention: just as I have been predicting for years, including my interview in Nicaragua.

The analogy to Vietnam is that, it turns out, JFK and Rostow and Taylor understood that US advisors would not be adequate (any more than in El Salvador, or any more than the contras); US combat units in SVN would be necessary, even to avoid defeat. And more than bombing of NVN would also be needed. It turns out that

Westmoreland did not believe what he was putting out in the fall of 1967, that US combat units in SVN were enough to achieve victory; his real strategy had been, since 1964-65, to invade North Vietnam (and Cambodia and Laos), and to use nuclear weapons.

In both cases these strategies were secret, for political reasons; they relied upon misleading Congress and the public, with measures against leaks that ultimately involved criminal violations. They aimed at producing *Faits Accomplis*, though with long political preparation (as well as logistical) to win acquiescence. And both were (I hope) aborted by revelations, not so much (in public consciousness) of the secret planning as of the lies and crimes committed in the course of maintaining secrecy.

Neither the public, the Congress, the media, or academic writings--with a few exceptions--ever really did become aware of Nixon's actual strategy and aims in Vietnam, nor how close he came to achieving them, nor of the relation of this project to the crimes and disclosures in Watergate. Thus, the essential parallel to the present scandal is not fully apparent, and may never become so. It may also be true that the greatest success of the antiwar movement, this time like last time, is an event that doesn't happen: the invasion of Nicaragua. (Like the invasion of North Vietnam, and the carrying out of nuclear threats in Vietnam).

In both cases, "imaginary lines" (as Senator Dole referred to the border between Vietnam and Cambodia, on "The Advocates" during the Cambodian "incursion": I was just reminded of this by meeting the son of Howard Miller, the Advocate, at the Freeze meeting: he is now head of the Lawyers' Committee Against Nuclear Weapons) proved to be genuinely frustrating constraints to the strategies of US Presidents. LBJ never did get troops across the imaginery line (more imaginery than most! Its status as an international frontier was mainly a figment of US policy) between South and North Vietnam. Nixon got into Cambodia and Laos only at great political cost. And Reagan has been preparing elaborately to move into Nicaragua, but may not make it.

So national sovereignty may not be much protection against US-supported coups and subversion, or even (recently) guerrilla movements; but it still constitutes a significant barrier to open invasion (though see South Vietnam!). It does define "aggression," though Reagan tried to popularize it by our liberation of Grenada. (I take it that Eastwood has remade "Sands of Iwo Jima" using Grenada!)

Even so, public and state reactions are much more selective and complex than when I was led to believe that the US had a simple policy of "opposing aggression," as an international gendarme, in Korea, 1950. Consider our encouragement of Iraq attacking Iran; Israel invading Lebanon. We did recognize the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, as aggression (though not the Chinese "counter-invasion")

of Vietnam). Our own planned invasion of Nicaragua would have lacked even the "invitation" that the Soviets claimed in Afghanistan, which was so reminiscent of our invitation into South Vietnam.

Clearly, our policy toward armed aggression is as selective and complex as, it now turns out, our policy toward "state terrorism." It had already drawn comment that Syria was unaccountably missing from our recent listing of terrorist states. As of this morning (Dec. 15, 1986, with the news of CIA recon help to Iraqi bombing of Iran) it appears that we have been giving major assistance to both sides in the Iran-Iraq war between two major terrorist states. And, of course, using the proceeds from the sales to Iran to finance our own terrorists in Honduras (and perhaps, South Africa's ally, Savimbi, as well as the Afghan rebels.) (Does Saudi Arabia, by the way, refrain from financing terrorists?) (In supplying Iran, we--along with Israel, another major terrorist state--seem to allied with Libya and Syria!) (And it may well turn out that we have been giving both kinds of assistance that we give to Iran/Iraq--weapons and reconnaissance information--to South Africa).

The situation is not unlike that pointed out by Chomsky and Herman about Carter's rationale for foreign policy, "human rights." (Although that was one degree less selective, having some real effects on Somoza, the Shah, and perhaps the Phillippines). Or as Chomsky had pointed out earlier, about anti-"Communism" as the rationale for our relationships and interventions in the Third World and Europe.

In each case, the definition of who is a terrorist, or an aggressor, or Communist-influenced, or a human rights violator, and who is not, depends almost entirely on how closely these elements are alined with or influenced by the US, and how the definition serves US or allied interests. (Interestingly, Netanyahu, the Israeli spokesman for a purist and "objective" definition of terrorism and an absolutist anti-terrorist policy turns up as a player in the Iran-contra dealings). (The same dealings put in question the "anti-imperialist" purism of the Iranian ayatollahs!--which has apparently forced Rasfanjani into defensive, preemptive revelations, to protect himself against charges of dealing with the Great Satan, although Khomeini himself apparently was in charge).